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SOME KEY ETHICAL CONCEPTS OF THE QUR'ĀN

Fazlur Rahman

ABSTRACT

Three concepts (*īmān, islām,* and *taqwā*) are presented by the author as basic to the ethical perspective of the Qur'ān. Each is analyzed in considerable detail, and the relations among these concepts are clarified. Then some of their implications for the Muslim community in its social and political dimensions are set forth.

There are three basic terms in the Qur'ān which come from different Arabic roots but which are surprisingly similar in their meanings. Together, they form the foundation of Qur'ānic ethics and give it its characteristic ethos; unless one grasps these concepts well, there is no way adequately to understand the nature of that ethic or its content. In this brief article I shall first discuss the meanings of these three terms, hoping thereby to bring out the essential similarity/connection among them, and then attempt to make some general observations about the nature of the Qur'ānic ethical doctrine as a whole.

ĪMĀN

The first term is obviously *īmān,* which is usually translated by "belief" or "to believe." The First Form meaning of the Arabic root *a-m-n* is "to be at peace with oneself" or "to feel no tribulation within oneself"; in this sense, it is equivalent to the term *muṭma'inn,* i.e., "one who is satisfied within oneself," and the two are used equivalently in the Qur'ān 16:112. In 2:283, *īmān* is used in the sense of "depositing something with someone for safekeeping" (*amānah* means a "safe deposit" in 4:58 and elsewhere, or a trust as in 33:72). In 4:83, 2:125, and elsewhere it means "safety from (outside) danger." It is safe to conclude, therefore, that "peace" and "safety" are its basic meanings. But it also comes to mean "being overly placid" over against a peril as in 7:97–99. In its Fourth Form (*āman),* the verb is followed by the preposition *li* (to, for) in two places (10:83; 24:26), where it appears to mean "to follow someone" or "to give oneself over to someone." But the standard use of this Form in the Qur'ān, and indeed in Arabic in generally, is with the preposi-

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tion *bi* (in). In this use the verb means "to have faith or trust in," the primary object of this faith or trust being God (*āman bi-allāh,* "to trust in God"). But the object can be the Qur'an (or revealed Books in general) or the Prophet Muhammad (or Prophets in general), the meaning of which is to believe in the truth of the Book and the Prophet that they have been sent by God. Again, the object can be the angels, i.e., that they exist as God's servants or, indeed, the Day of Judgment, i.e., that it will truly arrive. Or the verb can be used in its Fourth Form without any preposition or object, which simply means that the object is understood but not explicitly stated.

I said that in the First Form *a-m-n* means "to be at peace," "to be without tribulation," "to be safe." Now in the Fourth Form this basic meaning is carried over to the idea of "belief" or "faith" in God, which insures one's peace and safety. This is also implied in belief in the truth of (all) the Books of God, in His Prophets, and in the Judgment. This means that a person who does not accept God or does not have faith in Him and in other matters that flow from this (the truth of the Books, etc.), cannot be secure, at peace, integral, etc. "Do not be like those who forgot God and (eventually) God caused them to forget themselves" (59:19). *Īmān* is an act of the heart, a decisive giving oneself up to God and His Message and gaining peace and security and fortification against tribulation.

There are two points to be noted about faith. One is that it is not simply equivalent to intellectual or rational knowledge, but that it is not without such knowledge either. It is a "knot" (*'aqd*)," as Muslim theologians state, which "ties" the mind or "pegs" it to something sure and unshakably certain, but it has a sure basis in knowledge as well. Although the Qur'ān admits that mere intellectual knowledge does not ensure guidance ("Did you see the one who has taken his own desires—or wishful thinking—to be his God and God has sent him astray despite his knowledge?" 45:23), nevertheless, guidance is impossible without knowledge. Indeed, in numerous passages the Qur'ān clearly establishes faith-knowledge equivalence and affirms that faith increases with knowledge. "Say (O Muhammad!): My Lord! increase me in knowledge" (20:114). "Can those who know and those who do not know be equal?" "Can the blind and the seeing be the same, or the darkness and light?" "The dead and the living cannot be the same." (39:9; 35:19; 35:22; etc.) Faith, therefore, necessarily entails cognition.

Second, faith per se is a matter of the heart or heart-and-mind, as I have said, but it must result in action. This will be elaborated at some length below. But it must be said here that the separation of faith from action is, for the Qur'ān, a totally untenable and absurd situation; it *invariably* couples faith with good works when it talks about the faith itself or, more frequently, describes the state of the faithful (*mu'min,* pl. *mu'minūn*) and mentions faith alone without good works only when it is, for example, contrasting "those who believe" with "those who do not believe," etc. Conversely, real good works,

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as we shall see, must proceed from faith; works not rooted in faith are nothing and, in fact, often are worse than nothing because they are positively harmful.

ISLĀM

Let us now consider the term *islām.* We have seen that the basic meaning of *īmān* is to gain peace and security by an unflinching faith in God, His Message(s) and His Messenger(s). Now, the meaning of the root *s-l-m* is "to be safe," "whole," and "integral." The verb from the root in the First Form has not been used in the Qur'ān, but certain other parts of speech have been used. Thus *silm* occurs in 2:208, where it means "peace"; *salām* in 39:29, where it means "whole" as opposed to "division in conflicting parts," and *salām* in 4:91, where it also means "peace." It is thus used in numerous passages meaning "peace," "safety" or "greetings of peace." In the Fourth Form, the verb *aslam,* "he surrendered himself," "gave himself up," often *aslama wajhahū,* i.e., "he surrendered his person or himself," usually followed by *li-allah,* "to God," occurs numerously in different persons and different tenses and moods. The idea obviously is that one gains or preserves or develops one's wholeness, integrity, etc., by "surrendering oneself to [the Law] of God." The active participle *muslim* (in singular, dual and plural) occurs frequently, meaning "one who surrenders oneself to [the Law of] God." In 3:83 the whole universe is said to be *muslim* because it obeys God's laws. (This idea also occurs in other Qur'ānic passages, although this word is not used; for example, 41:11, 13:15; 16:49; etc.). Various Prophets and their communities from Noah onward, but particularly Abraham, are called *muslim.*

The verbal noun of the Fourth Form with the definite article, *al-islām* ("*the* surrender" or "the *genuine* surrender"), occurs six times in the Qur'ān. Jane Smith (1975) has collected these passages with translation. It is important to note that while *islām* and *muslim* are used invariably by the Qur'ān in their literal meaning, i.e., "surrender" or "one who surrenders to [the Law of] God," these are also used as proper names for the religious message promulgated by the Qur'ān and for the Community that had accepted it. Indeed, in 22:78, this religious message is attributed to Abraham, who is said to have given the name *Muslim* to this community. In most of these passages the original or literal meaning and the proper name are identified.

There are two very important points to note in connection with the term *islām.* The first is that it is integral to *īmān*: the "surrender" to God's Law, in its essential nature, is not possible without faith. Indeed, fundamentally speaking, the two are the same and have been used equivalently in many passages of the Qur'ān. Since this point is of basic importance to my thesis about the ethics of the Qur'ān, namely, that it is inexorably "religious" ethics,

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I think I should give a somewhat detailed proof of this point. Let us consider the following verses:

1. The Disciples of Jesus [*al-Ḥawāriyūn*] said to him, "We shall be God's helpers, we have faith [*āmannā*] in God and bear you witness that we are muslims [*muslimūn*]" (3:52).
2. Moses said to his people, "If you have faith in God, then put your trust in Him if you are muslims [*muslimūn*]" (3:84; 5:111).
3. "Those who believe [have faith] in our signs [verses] are are muslims [*muslimūn*]" (43:69).
4. "Those to whom we had already given the Book [i.e., the Bible] before this [i.e., the Qur'ān], believe in it [i.e., the Qur'ān]. And when it is recited to them they cry out: "We believe in it; it is the Truth from our Lord. We were already muslim [*muslimūn*—i.e., believers] before it" (28:52–53).

This last verse is one of several that refers to certain Jews and/or Christians who accepted Muhammad's mission at a very early stage, as I have noted elsewhere (1980: ch. 8). Let it also be borne in mind that three references in 1 and 2 above, namely, 3:52; 3:84 and 5:111, which convey the *īmān-islām* equivalence or absolute inseparability, date from the Medinan period, and particularly 5:111 from the late Medinan period, when the Muslim community had been already formally set up and when, according to Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *islām* had already become "reified" into Islam. What seems to give point to this "reification" theory is, of course, the fact we have already noted above, that in Medina *al-islām* is used both in the sense of surrender to (the Law of) God (which is equivalent to *īmān*) and the name of the religion of Muhammad and his community. (The giving of this name, however, is attributed to Abraham.) In order to get the full import of this usage, therefore, I shall consider both the relevant Meccan and the Medinan verses in which the term *islām* occurs and then conclude whether and, if so, how much reified the Medinan passages on the subject are. From Mecca we have the following two verses:

1. "Is a person whose heart God has opened up to *islām,* so that he is on [the path of] light from his Lord . . .?" (39:22).
2. "Whomsoever God wants to guide, He opens up his heart to *islām*" (6:125).

Islām in both of these verses can be construed as meaning both "surrender to God's law" and the concrete religion called Islam, even though this name was not *formally* given until the Medinan period. What brings out strikingly that *islām* in both of these verses is equivalent to *īmān* is the fact that it is identified with "God's Light" in one verse and "God's Guidance" in the other. Let us now consider the following Medinan verses.

1. "The true path of obedience [*dīn,* or "religion"] for God is *islām:* those who had been given the Book [earlier: i.e., Jews and Christians] did not come

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to differ from each other except after [sure] knowledge [i.e., Revelation] had come to them, which they did out of rebellion against each other . . ." (3:19).

2. "Whosoever seeks a path of obedience [or "religion": *dīn*] other than *islām,* it will not be accepted from him/her" (3:85).
3. "Today I [i.e., God] have perfected your path of obedience [*dīn*] for you, have consummated My blessings upon you and have been pleased for you with *islām* as your path of obedience [*dīn*] (5:4).

Along with these, some other Medinan verses ought to be considered which help elucidate the meaning of *islām* in the verses already quoted:

4. "God has chosen the path of obedience [*dīn*] for you, so let you not die but that you are muslims" (2:132).
5. After a critique of what the Qur'ān regards as the idolatrous beliefs of Jews and Christians, it says, "They want to extinguish God's Light [i.e., *islām* = Islam] by [blowing at it with] their mouths, but God refuses but to perfect His Light much to the chagrin of the *kāfirūn* [those who reject the truth]. He it is who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the true path of obedience [*dīn al-ḥaqq*] that He may cause it to prevail upon all [false] paths of obedience much to the chagrin of the idolators" (9:32–33).

We find an identical wording of the Qur'ān concerning Jews and Christians (and idolators) after a different sort of critique of those two earlier communities in 61:8–9. The most important point to note is that just as *islām* in Mecca is identified with God's Light and Guidance, so too in the Medinan verses. Just as in Mecca, again, those who are *muslimūn* are those who surrender, so too in Medina. This *islām* is said to be the only true *dīn* or path of obedience to God and the only one that is acceptable to Him (verses 1 and 2 in the preceding set of Medinan verses). This is in absolute conformity with what the Qur'ān has said all along, that *īmān* and *islām* are identical and confer peace, security, and integrity on their subject.

The second point to take note of is that in verses 1 and 5 in this set of Medinan verses strong issue is taken with Jews and Christians. In 3:19 they are accused of sectarian splits through willful stubbornness (*baghy*); therefore, they cannot be *muslimūn* for they cannot surrender to Truth. I have argued (1980: ch. 8) that it was on this basis that the Qur'ān withholds from Jews and Christians the title *ḥanīf* ("true believer in God") which it applies to Abraham, to other prophets and their contemporary followers and, finally, to Muhammad and his contemporary followers (who are required to be *ḥanīfūn*) because these Prophets and their followers are nondeviant, nonsectarian monotheists. Now, because these Jews and Christians distorted their original teaching, they necessarily divided themselves into sects, became deviant and vulnerable to *shirk* ("putting oneself alongside of God," "sharing God's divinity"). They are neither *ḥanīfūn* nor *muslimūn.* Indeed, in 61:7,

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the Qur'ān, obviously referring to Jews and Christians, says "Who is more unjust than the one who concocts lies upon God while he is being invited to *islām*?" Also, 98:4–5: "Those who had been given the Book [the Bible] did not split into sects except after the clear Proof [i.e., Revelation] had come to them; and they had been commanded only to serve God alone with exclusive devotion and obedience as *ḥanīfūn.*" On the other hand, whenever Abraham is mentioned in the Qur'ān, he is either called a *ḥanīf-muslim* ("one who believes and submits") or a *ḥanīf-non-mushrik* ("one who believes and does not engage in *shirk*); so with the Prophet Muhammad also and wherever *shirk* is attributed to the People of the Book, they are accused of sectarian splits as well (see 6:160–164; 30:30–32; 98:4–5). One is left with a strong impression that sectarian splits and vulnerability to *shirk* imply each other as opposed to a *ḥanīf,* a *muslim,* a believer in straight, upright religion in conformity with the nature of man.

We have dilated somewhat on the issue of the fundamental equivalence of *islām* with *īmān* because of the widespread belief generated by the commonality of Muslim creed-formulators that whereas *īmān* refers to belief, *islām* refers to overt acts. Thus, we are told by the standard medieval credal doctrine of Islam that *īmān* means belief in God, angels, revealed books, Prophets, and the Last Judgment (the Sunni creeds would characteristically add belief in God's predetermination of good and evil, which is nowhere to be found in the Qur'ān!), whereas *islām* primarily consists of the overt acts of (1) public profession of the Faith, (2) prayers, (3) paying *zakāt,* (4) fasting during Ramadan, and (5) performing pilgrimage. Now, this division, in the eyes of the Qur'ān, is much less than half truth, as verses quoted above on *islām* show. In the light of this, if "reification" of *islām* means "externalization" or "concretization" of *īmān* in such a way that the two are separate and can be, even conceptually, disconnected from each other, then it is patently false. But if it means *islām* as the concrete expression of *īmān* and the Muslim community as the organized form of that expression, then it is necessarily true and the Qur'ān itself is on record in its support. For, in the eyes of the Qur'ān, in contradistinction from, say, Christianity, personal inner faith is by no means enough for God's purposes, and an organized normative community is a dire necessity. This phenomenon could, therefore, be justifiably called "reification" of *īmān* or "sublimation" of the normative community. Both mean the same, although the "reification" theory as propounded by Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith seems to imply the opposite, that reification, instead of letting the dynamism of *īmān* concretely work itself in a spatio-temporal context, obstructs it. It is possible that Professor Smith has been jointly influenced by two factors, his own Christian background and the plight of the community that now exists in the name of Islam. In any case, the Qur'ān bears no such witness.

The second fundamental point about *islām* (the first being what we have

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expounded so far, that *islām* and *īmān* are equivalents) is that *islām* is the overt, concrete and organized working out of *īmān* through a normative community. The community members, therefore, must be grounded in *īmān* and its light (only then the normative as contemplated by the Qur'ān becomes possible), and, conversely, such light of *īmān* must work itself outward through this community (*īmān* and *islām* imply each other and this is the meaning of their equivalence). An individual may have some sort of *īmān* but it cannot be true and full *īmān* unless it is *islamically* expressed and worked out through a proper community, a community that will be both *muslim* and Muslim community.

TAQWĀ

We now come to the third and most central ethical concept of the Qur'ān, *taqwā,* which is normally translated "God-fearingness" or "piety." To bring out a fuller import of this term is the essential purpose of this essay. We have already seen that the roots of both *īmān* and *islām* have in common the basic constituents of safety, peace, and integrity (as opposed to danger, fragmentation, and disintegration). Interestingly and importantly, when we inquire into the root meaning of *taqwā,* we get the same answer. The root-letters *w-q-y* in Arabic mean "to protect," "to save from destruction," "to preserve." *Wiqāyah* or *waqāyah* is a container or a utensil in which something eatable or drinkable is so put that it does not spill away or get fragmented and thus lost. In the Eighth Form, of the verb, it means "to protect oneself from possible danger or attack," hence "to be careful," "take heed," etc. In 3:28, the term has been used in a literal, i.e., physical, sense, where it is said that Muslims may not be friends or allies of non-Muslims in preference over Muslims "unless you do it as a safety measure" (i.e., the possible harm the non-Muslims might do to you or to other Muslims). But its standard use in the Qur'ān is in the moral sense of "guarding against moral peril" or "protecting oneself against God's punishment," which itself can take many forms from the disintegration and downfall of nations to punishment of individuals on the Last Day.

Taking the element of "fear" to be the main constituent of *taqwā,* Professor T. Izutsu (1959) has advanced the theory that since the pre-Islamic Arab was a haughty and proud man, the Qur'ān came forth with the concept of *taqwā* ("fear of God") in order to break his haughtiness and humble his pride. But as our examination and analysis of this all-comprehensive concept will show, the element of fear conveyed by this term has a very complicated nature and the only translation that will do justice to it is perhaps "the fear of responsibility" which is very different from a fear someone might have, say, of a wolf, or a fear that a guilty person might have of police. In its possibly

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earliest use in the Qur'ān (91:8), it most probably means righteousness: "He [i.e., God] inspired [primordially] the human being with what is unrighteous and what is righteous [or with what is wrong and what is right]." And this meaning is preserved through the Qur'ān, with a certain salient emphasis to which we shall draw attention in order to elicit and elucidate its nature.

First, it should be noticed that while *īmān* ("faith") is primarily concerned with the inner life (although it is supposed to end in overt action), and while *islām* ("surrender to God's law") belongs primarily to outward action (although its inner dimension is equivalent to faith), *taqwā* equally comprises both faith and surrender. The Qur'ānic passage 2:177, after mentioning the change of the *Qiblah* (direction of prayer) from Jerusalem to Mecca, states: "It is no piety (or righteousness) that you turn your faces eastward or westward (in prayer); virtuous, rather, is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the Angels, the Book [i.e., all revealed Books] and the prophets [*and*] who gives of his wealth, despite his love for it, to his [poor] kinsmen, to orphans, to the indigent, to the way-farer, to those who ask for financial help, and for the freeing of captives and slaves; he who establishes prayers and pays *zakāt*-tax, those who keep their pacts when they make them and are steadfast in adversity, tribulation and in war—these are the ones who are truly righteous and these are the ones who have *taqwā*." That *taqwā* must be rooted in the inner faith, and that overt acts alone cannot be called *taqwā,* is clear from this passage. Furthermore, 22:37, in speaking about the ritual sacrifice made on the occasion of the pilgrimage, states: "The flesh [of these sacrificed animals] never reaches God, nor does their blood, but *taqwā* on your part does reach Him." In the same Sura (or chapter), and again connected with reference to the pilgrimage, the Qur'ān says (22:32): "Whosoever gives due weight to the rites of [or symbolic acts ordained by] Allah, these [must spring from] the heart's piety [or *taqwā*]." The reason why the Qur'ān has thus repeatedly stressed *taqwā* in connection with the pilgrimage rites is that, in contradistinction from other practices like prayer, *zakāt,* fasting, and *jihād,* these rites are especially liable to become purely mechanical unless due attention is paid to their spiritual meaning, which is called "*taqwā* of the heart."

Second, certain verses in the Qur'ān lend support to the view that *taqwā* is an ideal which must be aimed at, but which, for the most part, can only be approximated or realized to a limited degree. In 9:8 the Qur'ān warns those Muslims who, after the fall of Mecca, wanted to avenge themselves against their erstwhile persecutors and enemies: "O You who believe! Be upright unto God in your just witness-depositions, and let not the enmity [or hate] for a people lead you to be unfair to them; Be fair, for this is nearest to *taqwā.* And behave with responsibility [*taqwā*] toward God, [for] God knows well what you do." (See also 5:2 which has similar subject matter and import, but adds the words: "Cooperate with each other on the basis of righteousness and *taqwā,* not on the basis of sin and transgression.") In 2:237 it is stated,

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"And if you divorce them [your wives] before consummating the marriage, but after having settled the dower for them, then pay to them half of what you had settled." It adds: "except if she should forgo her claim, or her representative [literally: 'in whose hands is the marriage tie'] should"—an expression which according to some commentaries means the husband and would imply that the husband then pays the full dower. (Cf. also 4:20–21 which is close to this in spirit). The passage continues: "that you [i.e., either party] should forgo the claim is nearest to *taqwā*. And do not forget to treat each other with grace."

It is because of the positively protective function of *taqwā* that, for the Qur'ān, it becomes the most comprehensive concept both for avoiding errors and pursuing the right. *Taqwā* is described as the best "garment" one can wear (7:26), and as the "best provision" one can take for the future (2:197)—so that it is the best guarantee against exposure to peril and perdition. This is also the reason why the Qur'ān so frequently uses the idea of "wronging oneself [*ẓulm al-nafs*]," as I have already elaborated somewhat (1980: ch. 2). For, in the eyes of the Qur'ān, every wrong that one does, or every violence that one commits against anyone, is reflexive and therefore is wrong committed against oneself. This goes for individuals as well as for peoples, communities, and nations. It signifies the lack of *taqwā*. Besides the verses I have quoted in the aforementioned work, an interesting illustration of this is provided by 5:27–29 about Cain's murder of his brother Abel: "And recite to them (O Muhammad!) the true story of the two sons of Adam, when each offered a sacrifice but while the one's [Abel's] was accepted [by God], the other one's was not. He [Cain] said, 'I shall definitely slay you.' Abel replied: 'God accepts only from those who have *taqwā*. If you lay your hands on me to kill me, I am not going to lay my hands on you to kill you. I fear God, the Lord of the World. I want you to carry both my sins and yours so that you become among the people of Fire—this is the requital of the wrong-doers.'" The points to note here are that Abel had *taqwā*. Hence his sacrifice was accepted by God, and hence also he decided not to lay his hands on his brother, i.e., not to be the first to kill, since, as many commentators of the Qur'ān tell us, he was not sure Cain wanted actually to carry out his threat. But second, and even more importantly, as the consequences of murdering his brother, Cain had to carry his and his brother's sins as well, which meant sure perdition for himself.

The most important and basic function of *taqwā* is to allow man to correctly examine himself and to see the right from the wrong. To the extent that one is able to perform this moral self-X-raying, to that extent one has "protected" himself from error and its self-destructive consequences. It must be noted, however, that this self-examination as it is implied in the notion of *taqwā* can never mean self-righteousness. Just the contrary: an integral part of the meaning of *taqwā* is that while one examines oneself as objec-

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tively as possible, in order to guide one's conduct, there is no assurance that at any given moment one has chosen the right. If this self-examination had a built-in success, humanism would work perfectly well and therefore would be no need for transcendence. But we know how subjective the consciences of people can be. *Taqwā* implies this very transcendence since it implies that while the choice is ours and the effort is ours, the final and truly objective judgment upon our performance is not ours but "lies with God." The greatest enemy of man for the Qur'ān, the most powerful Satan, is his own self-deception. The terms *hawān* (pl. *ahwā*—one's own innermost and hard-to-detect desires) and *umnīyah* (pl. *amānīn*—one's wishful thinking) occur very frequently in the Qur'ān, and even the Prophet is told several times that Revelation cannot take into account his own wishes (75: 16; 20: 114; and elsewhere). Indeed, the greatest task for man is to objectify his inner state: "Whenever these people are told not to work corruption on the earth, they say, 'We are only reforming.' Beware, these are the corrupters, but they do not realize it" (2: 11). Again, "Say, shall we tell you of those who are the greatest losers in their deeds? They are those whose whole effort has got lost in the lower pursuits of this life, but who think they have performed prodigies" (18: 103–104).

This deep-seated self-deception of man is directly connected with the Qur'ānic notion of the "weighing of deeds" on the Day of Judgment. As the verse just quoted indicates, while one may think one has performed prodigious deeds, when these deeds are put in the long-range perspective of the human future, they may turn out to be quite devoid of meaning and without any substance, for they were not rooted in the light of faith or produced in the state of *taqwā*. When talking about the myopic and insubstantial quality of men's deeds, the Qur'ān employs particularly graphic language. "Their deeds are like ashes with which strong winds have made off on a stormy day; they cannot hang on to anything of what they earned" (14: 18). Again: "Their deeds are like a mirage in a desert which a thirsty person takes to be water, but when he arrives at it, he finds it to be nothing—however he discovers God there" (24: 39). Once again (On the Final Judgment): "We shall proceed towards their deeds and shall show them to be motes scattered around" (25: 23). This is because these deeds were done without *taqwā*: "The end belongs to those with *taqwā*" (7: 128; 11: 49), and "God is with the people of *taqwā*" (2: 194; 9: 36; 3: 76; 9: 47; etc.).

This is why the belief in *al-ākhirah* (the End, or the Final Judgment) is so central for the Qur'ān. First of all, without "the End," man falls into a state of living from moment to moment, and becomes not only "short-sighted" but like animals. It is the *ākhirah* that provides the necessary vision and brings *taqwā* into operation. The pursuit of "this world" (*al-dunyā*) is another expression for sinking into the here-and-now. People with this attitude to life are "like cattle, indeed more misguided, for they are the heedless ones" (7: 179). The whole effort of the Qur'ān in inculcating *taqwā* is to raise man from

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this hour-to-hour life so that he may establish his conduct on a solid basis with a view to long range objectives, to the "End of affairs." Second, the "Day of Accounting" (*yawm al-ḥisāb*), when all deeds will be weighed and their real worth established for the future transformation of life, will be the Hour of Truth when a person shall face himself/herself. The layers of "heedlessness" under which man's "heart" is buried in this life, shall be removed at that Hour and his real self excavated: "You were in heedlessness of this [Hour], but now that We have removed your veil, your sight today is keen!" (50:22). Everyone will recognize himself/herself exactly for what he/she is, and the Qur'ān emphatically states that "nobody shall be dealt with unfairly," "nobody's due shall be denied," etc. (2:281; 3:25, 161; 4:49, 124, and numerous other verses). The future career of man will be based not only on full stock-taking but also on full *self*-stock-taking.

But, of course, the effort of the Qur'ān is directed towards creating now that condition of self-awareness through *taqwā*. Every moment is the hour of Judgment, and he/she is truly the maker of his/her own destiny: "The earth, indeed, belongs to God and He causes whomsoever He wills of His servants to inherit it—and the End belongs to those with *taqwā*" (7:128). That is, the eventual success both in "this life" and the "next" belongs to those who conduct themselves through *taqwā*. That there is essential continuity between "this life" and the "hereafter," I have already shown (1980: ch. 6). "The earth is inherited by My good servants" (21:105); "Those who had been oppressed We caused them to inherit the East of the earth and its West" (7:137). The following verse is about the Hereafter: "Those people who had *taqwā* vis-à-vis their Lord shall be led to the Garden in troops, so that when they approach it its gates will have been opened and its guards shall say to them, 'Peace upon you. You have done well. Enter and abide therein.' They [with *taqwā*] shall say, 'All praise be to God who has fulfilled His promise to us and has given us [all] the earth, so we can make our abode in the Garden wherever we will . . .'" (39:73–74).

According to the Qur'ān leadership in this world does not last forever since a people in power and in prosperity sooner or later lose *taqwā* and begin to "sow corruption on the earth," so that their exit becomes inevitable. They become *'ālin* ("too big") on the earth and hence become too small for it; they grow *'atiy* ("too proud and conceited") for the truth and try to turn wrong into right and right into wrong through their sheer might and are, therefore, either humiliated or destroyed. At no point, therefore, can a people or a community take either itself or God for granted: "Does it never strike those who inherit the earth following upon its earlier rulers that if We will We would smite them [too], thanks to their misdeeds?"—i.e., We shall seal up their hearts so that they will lose the capacity to listen to the truth (7:100). The Qur'ān declares that it is man's own persistently wrong action that provokes God against him (despite God's infinite mercy!): "Do you want to provide God with clear cause against you?" (4:164).

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How can one preserve the state of *taqwā* individually and collectively? Irrespective of the fact whether or not a person or a community will preserve *taqwā,* the answer of the Qur'ān is quite simple. Man must always keep in view his own moral constitution and his status in the scheme of things. The basic fault that the Qur'ān finds with man is that his own view of himself is very small. Because of this he behaves with a petty mind, narrow vision, and exasperating selfishness. This happens in all fields of human action, political, social, economic and, indeed, religious. Man is much too weak and small-minded (17: 100; 4:28). "Man is by nature unstable. When evil touches him he panics, but when good things come his way he prevents them from reaching others" (70: 19–21). Indeed, this theme is so persistent and strong in the Qur'ān that one can say that, besides the condemnation of *shirk,* man's narrow-mindedness is its major preoccupation. In fact, a case could be made on a solid Qur'ānic basis that *shirk* itself is a manifestation of this narrow vision and petty-mindedness. All man's ills flow from this condition. The remedy is to open up one's vision and rise above pettiness to God, which can be done through cultivating *taqwā.*

Thus the moral condition of man is that he is, by nature as it were, sunk in selfishness and pettiness. But his "real" nature and status in creation, i.e., what he ought to be, is very exalted indeed. He has been given intellectual powers whereby he defeated angels in a competition of creative knowledge. (See the story of the creation of Adam in 2: 30ff.) His misfortune is that he often does not use those powers to seek guidance but to work mischief and hence has failed so far in fulfilling the Trust that God reposed in him. "He [man] has not so far fulfilled what God had commanded him [primordially, through his 'real' nature]" (80: 23). "Indeed, We had offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were frightened of it. But man bore it willingly. He is, indeed, unjust [to himself] and fool-hardy" (33: 72). Because of his native selfishness and narrowness, man is always prone to go to extremes: he is full of pride one moment and a helpless prey to hopelessness the next moment; panicky under trial and thinking he is all but God when out of trial (70: 19–21). The only way he can attain *taqwā* is to recognize both his powers and the limits God has put upon him as his natural condition. He is neither free like God nor helpless like a stone; he is neither omnipotent nor impotent; neither omniscient nor ignorant. Only by staying within this positive framework can he maximize his moral energy and make progress, which is the essence of *taqwā.* Neither God nor nature can displace him, nor yet can he displace nature or God. Those fruitless discussions of human free-will which try to make out that, if natural causation or divine causation works, human free-will cannot (and vice-versa) appear absolutely misguided in the light of the Qur'ān. For it assumes all the three causations simultaneously—although divine causation either works through nature or through man and, in fact, neither of these can operate without God. This either/or position with regard to human free causation is as meaningless

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in the view of the Qur'ān as to say that man is either omnipotent or impotent altogether, or that he is either omniscient or ignorant altogether!

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

A community that develops *taqwā* becomes God's instrument and, indeed, His trustee and vicegerent on the earth, but it loses this status when it becomes morally incapacitated, as we have seen before. No community can, therefore, claim to be God's specially elected people or his privileged children or his automatic darlings. This is, in fact, a most preposterous claim as it lays proprietory claims upon God. The Qur'ān had sternly rejected such claims on the part of Christians and Jews (2: 111,113,120,135, etc.). But it had also told Muslims in no unclear terms, "If you turn your backs [on this teaching], God will bring in another people as a substitute who will not be like you" (47: 38). Indeed, 4: 144 quoted above ("Do you want to provide God with a clear cause against you?") was addressed to Muslims, the Companions of the Prophet, in Medina. The Qur'ān often states that when He removes a people/community from power or destroys them, He makes a whole new start with a new people (14: 28; 6: 6; 21: 11; etc.).

Yet, a Muslim (= *muslim*) community is indispensible for God's purposes: "O you with faith [*īmān*]! Have *taqwā* vis-à-vis God [i.e., protect yourselves from such deeds as would entail God's punishment], and do not die but that you are muslims" (3: 102). Also, "Abraham and Jacob had admonished their sons: 'O our [literally *my*] sons! God has chosen the [right] religion [*dīn*] for you, so do not die but that you are muslims'" (2: 132). Again, Abraham said, "O our Lord! Make the two of us [me and Ismael] those who surrender [*muslimain*] to You and [make] from our progeny a community that shall surrender itself [*ummatan muslimatan*] to You" (2: 128). It must be noted in 3: 102 quoted here that *īmān, islām,* and *taqwā* are mentioned together: those who have faith must cultivate *taqwā* and must do *islām* or surrender to God's Law. We have said above that while *īmān* is rooted in the inner life of the individual, *taqwā* includes *īmān* and results in action, and *islām* is that overt activity that expresses *īmān* and *taqwā*. We also said that *taqwā* is in this manner comprehensive of *īmān* and *islām.* But when collective life and community activity is in question, the term *islām* takes over, which is, as it were, the end result of individual *īmān* and *taqwā*. It is obvious, then, that a *muslim* community presupposes individuals with *īmān* and *taqwā* without which such a community is unthinkable, but conversely, *īmān* and *taqwā* must result in a *muslim community* and not just isolated individuals. Why?

This is because Islam aims necessarily and centrally (and not just peripherally or indirectly) at the creation of a world order wherein its imperatives and principles will be embodied in such a way that the "earth shall be re-

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formed." We are using Islam with a capital "I" now because Islam has become the name of a specific religion (*dīn*) carried by a special community. This Muslim Community is, for the Qur'ān, "the best community produced for mankind" because "you command good and forbid evil and you have faith in God" (3:110). It is to be noted that, first of all, this community is a *social* order based on *īmān, taqwā,* and *islām.* Only when it has become a social order does it become a *political* order to play a world role. One cannot build a political order unless the basis of a social order has been laid firmly. This is what the Prophet Muhammad did, and this is what those will have to do who wish to establish the Islamic order once again. The basic failure of the current Fundamentalist movements in the Muslim world is that they have been aiming at establishing, and some have actually succeeded in establishing, political power without first creating a Muslim Community. In fact, all the Fundamentalist movements in the Middle East, the Subcontinent, and Southeast Asia have been misled by their leaders into thinking that once they get political power, all will become Islamic, the result being that when some of them somehow manage to get actual political control, their Islam proves to be no more than a broken reed. The truth is that the current Muslim Community has to become a real *muslim* community once again: it must clearly understand what "surrender to God's law" means and must give its commitment to this.

Nevertheless, a Muslim Community such as the Qur'ān envisages is called for imperatively and desperately. This community the Qur'ān also calls "the Medinan Community, so that you can be witnesses over mankind." Presumably, what the Qur'ān has in mind is that Islam's task is to mediate between what it regards as Jewish particularism on the one hand and the overly "liquid" character of Christianity. In any case, it does have in mind the function of mediating between extremes, thus removing what it continuously calls "corruption of the earth" (*fasād fi'l-arḍ*) and restoring a healthy socio-political order based upon a viable ethical foundation. If this is what Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith calls the "reification" of religion, then reification it must be: God will not remain suspended in a state of "aerification" but must come down palpably on earth. But, of course, any organized social order must come up to the criteria of a muslim community as laid down by the Qur'ān in order to become the Muslim Community.

From a communal point of view, the most basic ailment of humanity has been the almost perennial and ubiquitous concept that the "average man," "the masses," are "no good." They are doomed forever to wallow in moral wretchedness and mental blindness, and hence they must follow the lead of those enlightened minds and exalted souls who have "made good" their humanity. While intellectuals and moral dandies have contemptuously laughed at certain grotesque features of the Hindu caste system, they have forgotten that basically and essentially all human societies have been guilty of the same attitude toward "the masses." The only difference is that Hinduism has frankly

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and ruthlessly formalized this attitude and created certain heinous social distinctions from which other societies can boast to be free. But one has to scratch only a little beneath the surface to discover, in the words of a Persian poet, that "This is a sin that is committed in *your* town as well!"

The Qur'ān is also highly critical of the attitudes of the majority of human beings. Witness phrases like "They are like cattle, indeed, even more misguided." But the whole point of the Qur'ān is that these people are *not* really cattle; they are humans and, therefore, the effort to raise their level is not only "good" but is absolutely imperative if the human race is to become a Muslim Community. That this is a task both feasible and necessary is throughout envisaged by the Qur'ān. This was the rationale behind the setting up of the Muslim Community, a "community of believing brothers" (49: 10). Even the non-Muslim writers have acknowledged the generally egalitarian constitution of the actual Muslim Community. Nevertheless, we must ask the question as to how far this "egalitarianism" and this "brotherhood" is a reality among Muslims and to what extent it is merely a desideratum. On a closer examination of the data of Islamic history, one might say that so far as economic and purely religious spheres are concerned, the exploitation of the masses has not been as great as in other religions and the spirit of Islamic egalitarianism, despite its emaciation, has not altogether disappeared. But at the political, the religio-intellectual, and the moral levels, the Muslim Community has been as guilty of neglecting, ignoring, and condemning the masses as any other tradition.

In its egalitarian vision of the Islamic body-social and body-political, for example, the Qur'ān has laid down that Muslims must decide their affairs through mutual consultation on an equal footing: "Their affairs shall be decided through mutual consultation [*shurā*]." (42: 38) This, of course, applies to all fields: political, religious, social, economic, etc. At the intellectual-moral plane, the Qur'ān had definitely advocated that a group from among every segment of Muslim society should "acquire knowledge and insight in Faith [*li-yatafaqqahū fī l-dīn*] so that they should, in turn, teach the rest of the members of the Muslim Community (9: 199). The obvious meaning of this verse is that the gap between the average members of the Community and their religio-moral leadership must be minimized in the interests of Islamic egalitarianism. Yet the Muslims have, since the very early times, suffered from a religious leadership that has had little to do with the masses and has been ruled by political autocrats. The "mutual consultation" (*shūrā*) of the Qur'ān was never institutionalized.

Worse still, the "mutual consultation" of the Qur'ān was distorted by Sunni Muslim political theorists into "the ruler's consulting people whom he thought fit for consultation"! As for the Shī'a, there never was any question of a *shūrā*-democracy, since rule really belonged to the Absent *Imām* ("religious leader"), who is, for some reason, in hiding. As for the religio-moral plane,

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the *ulamā'* ("religious teachers"), who were supposed to raise the standards of the common man, first by gaining knowledge of and insight into the Faith and then by communicating it effectively to others, failed in their task, with the resultant quasi-Brahminism that became the bane of Islam. No wonder, such a critic (and poet) as Muhammad Iqbal cried out in anger: "Thanks to the ugliness of your face, Even your mirror is in disgrace!"

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, a series of Muslim thinkers and reformers have advocated political reform basing their arguments on the Qur'ānic principle of *Shūrā* and contending that the only way to implement this principle in today's context is to institute representative forms of government so that the will of the people will be decisive in the process of decision-making. This "going back to the Qur'ān" facilitated greatly the gradual introduction into the various lands of Islam of constitutional forms of government. But serious questioning of the validity of democracy continues in Muslim societies, and there has been recently a relapse into religious or religio-military dictatorships in certain Muslim countries. The basis of this questioning of the validity of democracy is partly provided by the substance—not the form—of democracy in the West. Many Muslims hotly argue that the democracy in the Western countries rests on the will of people who have no vision whatever of any higher moral order for man and that the only considerations that motivate their voting behavior are narrow, selfish, and materialistic. It is to be feared that the severe critique of Muhammad Iqbal quoted above against the Muslims also applies with equal force to Western democracies, not qua democracies but qua secular societies that have degenerated in terms of ethical orientations to an extraordinarily low and myopic level. Muslim critics are, however, obviously wrong in rejecting democracy, which is positively and patently enjoined by the Qur'ān as the moral foundation of the Community's life. There is, therefore, nothing wrong, from a Qur'ānic point of view, with Western democratic forms—in fact, these are to be praised. Muslims would do better to give an ethical substance to the individual and collective life of the community. For among the historic religions only Islam had consciously founded a community on the universal basis of *islām*.

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